The Novel Experiences of Guy Garrick, Detective

By ARTHUR B. REEVE.

The Soldier of Fortune

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"HELLO, Garrick—you couldn't have dropped in at a more opportune moment. Are you busy this evening?"

"Not especially," replied Garrick to the cordial greeting of John Burke, house detective at the Vanderveer Hotel. Why, what's the matter?"

"You've heard of the beautiful Senora Castillo, I suppose?"

"Well, I understood that she was among the wealthy Mexican refugees staying here. What about the senora?"

"You know," slowly replied Burke, "she is a very beautiful woman."

"Which is no crime," smiled Garrick.

"Quite the contrary," smiled back Burke. "You see, it's this way: Lately I've been noticing her and she seems to have a lot of annoyers—admirers, I suppose they would call themselves. Now, yesterday one of them who looks like a Mexican called and sent his card up with something written on it in Spanish. She saw the man in the parlor—a Senor Morelos, according to the page's recollection of the name on the card. Of course, I don't know what it was all about, but they seemed to be not on unfriendly terms, although, when my attention was called to it, I could imagine that the senora was nervous—and just a bit frightened."

"Has the fellow been around again?" asked Garrick.

"Yes. Not half an hour ago he sauntered into the cafe. I happened to catch sight of him and watched him for a few moments as he sat in a booth sipping a drink and poring over a piece of paper. He seemed to be in some perplexity, but finally he appeared to make up his mind about something. He tore up the paper into little pieces, threw part of them into the cuspidor and scattered the rest as he walked out into the corridor."

"Did you get the bits of paper?" asked Garrick quizzically.

"Yes, and I have pasted them together as well as I can. They seem to be a telegraphic message in a cipher. But I can't make anything out of it."

Burke spread a sheet of paper out on which he had as carefully fitted together the yellow pieces of the telegram as if he had been playing with a jigsaw puzzle. Garrick scanned the reconstructed message keenly. From the date it had evidently been delayed in transmission, was dated at El Paso, Tex., and read:

"Yeaome & Iesu anl nrsem esdy nucet seyu epnr seucnd wuevic voilit snr."

It was unsigned, and there was no clue to the sender, although it bore the address of "Morelos, the Mexican-American tea room, New York."

Garrick had quickly written the message out again, reversed, and was reading it slowly.

"Rns tillov civeuw dnoues rope uyes tecun ydse mesrn Ina Usel & Emoaey."

"There are ten e's," he ruminated, tapping them off quickly with a pencil. "At first sight it looks as if 'e' must really stand for 'e.' It is always the letter most commonly used and here it is the most frequent."

Burke was waiting impatiently. "It will take time to puzzle the thing out," he broke in at length.

"Where is Senor Castillo?" asked Garrick.

"Just the point," put in Burke. "I believe that he remained in Mexico and sent his wife up here for safety. There have been rumors in the papers that he has been captured by the bandits of his state. Naturally, you will say, that was enough to have caused a change in the senora. But there is something else going on here. I wish to heaven I knew what it was!"

"They are wealthy, I suppose?"

"Yes. I understand that Jose Castillo is one of the greatest haciendados in the country."

"Perhaps it may be blackmail—or she may be the victim of a get-rich-quick gang."

Burke shook his head. "I can't say," he replied dubiously. "I wanted your opinion, so I have taken the time to explain things to you. Now if you'll come around with me to the Red Room and look in, I'll show you the man."

Burke led the way down the hall in much the manner of a hound eager for the right scent. From the shadow of a curtained door he pointed out to Garrick a couple seated at a table discussing something earnestly in a low tone.

Senora Castillo was really a very beautiful woman and would have been so without the added attraction of the latest Parisian creation which accentuated rather than concealed her exquisite form. From her hat, which breathed of the Rue de la Paix, to the heels of her dainty slippers she was a charming creature, artificial, it was true, as were many of her countrywomen of her class, but with an attractiveness because of the very artificiality. The man was a dark-faced, olive-skinned fellow, tall, military in bearing, straight as an arrow, with a little black imperial and a distinguished shock of bushy, dark hair. They were a striking couple.

"It's evident," whispered Garrick, "that he is an ardent admirer whatever she may think of him."

Burke motioned to a waiter who was passing with a tray. A moment later he rejoined Garrick.

"I'm going to give you an example of the secret service I've built up here at the Vanderveer," he whisperd, with just a trace of pride. "This is the first time I've had a chance to try this on our friend Morelos. Always before he was either alone or they sat where I couldn't get at them. You see, I want to find out what they are talking about. So I have given Charley his instructions. Now, watch."

Charley, the waiter, hovered about the table of the couple, putting seltzer in the glasses, straightening things on the next table, quick with a match or a spoon when it was needed, doing everything a most obsequious waiter could do to earn a tip—and overhear snatches of conversation.

From time to time the waiter would glance toward the curtained door, as if waiting for a signal.

Perhaps ten minutes later, Burke crooked a finger and a moment later the waiter joined them, on some pretext, coming by a roundabout way.

"Is there anything to report?" asked Burke eagerly.

"They seem to be talking about a ransom. I heard the man say something about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

Burke gave a low whistle. "A ransom for Castillo!" he cried. "That's it, Garrick. They are negotiating. Did you hear the woman say anything, Charley?"

"No, I couldn't catch what she said. But she seemed to be pleading with him."

"I say, Charley," cut in Garrick, as the waiter passed again with a tray of fresh glasses, "rub off those glasses carefully. Here, let me do it. Don't touch them; or, better yet, get the captain of the waiters. He can handle them carefully with gloved hands. And that will not excite suspicion, either. When they are through with the glasses, have them brought back here to me. Only tell him to handle them carefully—with gloves, and only with the thumb and forefinger."

Several minutes later the empty glasses were in the possession of Garrick.

"Is there anywhere I can take these and not be disturbed?" asked the young detective.

"I have a room of my own—a sort of rogues' gallery—on the roof," smiled Burke. "No one will disturb us there."

"Good! Leave some one here to watch them and tip off Charley to keep his ears open."

Up in Burke's room, on the top floor, Garrick took the glasses and deftly shook over them some ordinary talcum powder which one of the bell-hops brought him. Then he blew the powder off with a few gentle puffs of his breath.

There on the smooth, crystal surface, clear and distinct, came out a series of finger prints.

"Not as good as I could wish," he remarked thoughtfully, regarding the smudges on the glass. "But we'll have to do our best."

Hastily he ran over them, endeavoring to arrange them in their correct sequence. He was doing an elaborate calculation with figures on a piece of paper.

"Police headquarters—bureau of identification?" asked Garrick over the telephone a few minutes later, when he had finished his calculation. "Hello, captain—this is Garrick. Have you a pencil handy? Well, take this. Twenty-seven over twenty-nine. Yes. Here's the rest of it. I can't be sure. They are very poor prints. But if you'll look up what you have in the files I'll be eternally in your debt. Call me at the Vanderveer—ask for the house man—Burke."

"Good idea, Garrick," complimented Burke, as the receiver dropped back on its hook.

"Good if it works out," replied Garrick.

He had spread out the cipher message again.

"As long as your man downstairs is watching them, we may as well try to figure this out," he remarked.

For a long time he studied over the thing, trying all sorts of combinations and using every method he could think of in order to unravel the mystery it contained.

"Of course," he said, half to himself, "almost any cipher is readable if you go at the thing scientifically. But I want to get at it quickly."

He was studying the message as he had reversed it. Suddenly his face lighted up.

"I think I have it," he cried, "without all the elaborate calculation I had feared. Take those last letters, EMOAEY. It suggests to me MONEY—that is what they are after. The E probably was added from the previous word. If it is EMONEY, that gives us A=N, E=E, of course, and the other letters are the same in both the cipher and the original, M=M, O=O, and Y=Y."

"Humph!" exclaimed Burke; "that's too simple."

"It's not so simple at that," urged Garrick, "but a little scientific common sense goes a long way in this business, Burke. The two things that interested them were money and Castillo. Well, take the first word, RNS TILLOV. The letters STILLO suggest something. If R=C and N=A, then the other letters remain the same—S=S, T=T, I=B, and L=L. This is luck. Let me see how it works out."

Garrick was thoughtfully tapping on the table with the pencil, mentally trying to fit in what he had discovered with what had so far been hidden.

An idea seemed to flash over him all at once. He wrote the message out in the dots and dashes of the Morse alphabet without any abbreviations. To Burke it meant nothing. But Garrick ran his eye over it again, then paused a moment and began tapping on the table with the pencil.

"By George, that's it, Burke!" he cried excitedly. "Listen. I am tapping it out."

Clearly clicked out the letters of the original message:

"YEAOME & IESU ANL NRSEM ESDY NUCET SEYU EPNR SEUCND WUEVIC VOLIJT ENR."

"Now!" he cried, "I reverse it."

Instead of the meaningless collection of letters, when it was reversed the dots and dashes actually made words, some letters which were formed by symmetrical combinations of dots and dashes being the same, others formed by reversed combinations being transposed.

The message read: "Castillo bribed guard, escaped yesterday. Use mescal and seize money."

"'Use mescal and seize money,' repeated Burke, looking blankly at Garrick. 'Mescal—that's that Mexican brandy.'"

Garrick was palpably excited by his discovery. "No—not the brandy. I don't believe that is what is meant. No, there is another kind of mescal, the mescal button, the peyote bean. Castillo's estate was in the northern part of Mexico. That is where the mescal bean grows. Castillo has escaped."

"But the money," interrupted Burke, "what money?"

The telephone rang. Garrick answered it quickly.

"Police headquarters," he explained as he replaced the receiver. "They have something on 27 over 29—which means really the twenty-seventh division of the twenty-ninth row, as they classify finger prints, theoretically in thirty-two rows of thirty-two pigeonholes each. There was just enough in those prints I took so that they didn't have to hunt through many files. But in one file they tell me they found prints which correspond to the combination I gave them. They are of a man named Santos, arrested first in 1911 for a minor offense and released, but now under indictment by the Federal grand jury for counterfeiting Mexican money in this country. Your friend Morelos is really Santos without doubt." Then Garrick and Burke were whisked down to the main floor to find out how matters progressed there. Almost at the elevator door they were met by the waiter, Charley.

"They have just gone out!" he exclaimed.

"Together?" asked Burke.

"Yes, sir, and your man is shadowing them. He spoke to me as he followed them out, sir, and told me to tell you he'd hang on until he could get a chance to call you up."

"I suppose there is nothing to do until we hear from him," said Burke impatiently. "He's a good man—perhaps he can shadow them better than even I could, for I'm never sure but that some of these people know me. They wouldn't be likely to know him, for even most of the servants here don't know who is working for me."

In spite of the fact that it would in all probability be only a matter of minutes before they heard from Burke's shadow, Garrick could scarcely restrain his impatience. Charley had faithfully hovered about the pair, but had overheard nothing except a couple of references to some apparently mutual friends, among them a Senora Mendez.

At last the telephone switchboard operator motioned to Burke, who was standing near the cigar counter trying to look unperturbed. A moment later he emerged perspiring from the booth and rejoined Garrick.

"Where are they?" demanded Garrick.

"My man has shadowed them to the Mexican-American Tea Room."

"The place to which Morelos, or Santos, whoever he is, had his message delivered!" exclaimed Garrick. "Where is it?"

"Scarcely around the corner. He shadowed them there, but did not go in because he wanted to be able to telephone us. He is watching across the street from a drug store."

"Do you know anything of the place, Burke?"

"Only that it is frequented largely by Mexicans in the city who want to discuss affairs in their native land to the accompaniment of dishes hot with peppers and chilis."

"Burke," exclaimed Garrick under his breath, "I'll wager she is going to arrange to pay that ransom. We must follow her. Get me my office," he added to the telephone girl. "I think we can trust your man to watch them just a bit longer, since he has been so successful so far."

Garrick had scarcely finished describing a peculiar apparatus which he wanted one of his men to send up to the Vanderveer immediately and rejoined Burke at the cigar counter when the lafter laid his hand cautiously on his arm.

"Don't look around yet," whispered the house detective, "but after a minute step over and light a cigarette. Then notice that Mexican standing at the desk, near the house 'phone."

Garrick did so. He was a swarthy man of medium height, rather good looking, and would have been inconspicuous if it had not been that he had a peculiar sidelong glance from his dark eyes, as if he would watch without being watched or seeming to watch.

"I didn't hear whom he asked for," continued Burke, as Garrick rejoined him puffing vigorously, "but the clerk repeated the number of the room in such a way that I could hear it. It was the senora's number."

"Your young man is here," whispered the telephone girl to Garrick a few minutes later.

"Very well. Send him up to Mr. Burke's room. Burke, I want you to come up there again with me. Meanwhile, have some one else tail that man at—there he goes now. You'll have to do it yourself. Call me up here as soon as you get an opportunity. If I'm not here I'll leave word what to do."

Quickly Garrick rode up again to Burke's little office on the top floor, where his boy had left a box which was quite small, including a dry battery. In the office he set it up on an ordinary tripod, much as if it had been the camera of a traveling photographer. Inside, however, was a small tantalum incandescent lamp of peculiar shape and arranged so that it glowed from the current of the battery. Quickly adjusting the thing, he attached to it a sort of headpiece. Then, with a last look to be sure that everything was all right, he picked up a similar smaller instrument and placed it under his coat, stuffing out the pocket on the opposite side to make it look as symmetrical as he could.



"What are you doing?" moaned Castillo. Are you crazy?"

At the desk he hastily scrawled a note telling Burke that he was going around to the tea room and would call up before taking any further steps. He had scarcely turned the corner below the Vanderveer when he ran almost plump into Burke himself.

"What's the matter?" asked Garrick, looking about at the deserted street and seeing no mysterious stranger. "Did you lose him?"

"No. He went around to that confounded tea room and went in. I thought there was no use in my staying there, too, and as it was only a step around here, I thought I'd come back to tell you. What shall we do?"

Burke had fallen into Garrick's stride as he lounged along much like a sightseer to whom the night life of even a side street was interesting.

"What did the fellow who was watching the place say? Has she gone yet?"

"The senora? No. But he seems much excited. There seems to be some kind of entertainment going on there, he says. I followed our mysterious friend around there and watched him go in."

"I think I'll just about sit in and belong—make it a regular party," laughed back Garrick.

Garrick paused on the corner. Down the street, Burke's shadow could be seen hanging nonchalantly about in a dim, unlighted part of the block.

"That won't do, either," remarked Garrick. "Some one is going to spot that man. I'm going into that tea room, and as soon as I do I want you to withdraw him and go back to your office. You'll find that I have arranged a little surprise up there for you. In the middle of the floor there is something that looks very much like a camera on a tripod, except that instead of a black cloth to throw over your head there is a headpiece that fits over your ears. There are other exceptions, too—but if you'll just get back there and get that headgear on and keep it on—well, I think you will learn something to your advantage soon. I may depend on you, Burke?"

"Absolutely, Garrick," replied Burke, as the two parted.

A minute later Garrick sauntered into the little Mexican tea room and curio shop. It was an old three-story, brownstone house which had been altered with the uptown shift of trade, and now in the basement had the appearance of a cheap restaurant.

In spite of the fact that both Burke and his shadow had seen several people enter, the basement with its lines of tables was deserted.

Garrick paused. Now and then sounds indicated that upstairs at least there were guests, perhaps in private dining-rooms away from the interruptions of the common herd of customers who might drop in. A single waitress in the rear was reading a newspaper.

As Garrick entered she rose and advanced toward him.

"I would like to see the er—er—proprietor," he asked, repeating the question in as good Mexican Spanish as he could improvise.

"Senora Mendez?" queried the girl.

"Yes," he answered. "Is the senora in?"

"I will see."

Senora Mendez, who returned with the girl from the mysterious region above stairs, was of quite a different type from that which Garrick had imagined. For one thing, he could not help noticing her languishing black eyes, which might in her younger days well have belonged to a Spanish dancing girl. Yet at the same time there was something shrewd and sharp about them, as if the owner had an eye to the main chance whether it were a business deal or a romance.

Garrick bowed low.

"I am going to give a dinner to some friends of mine, mostly Englishmen, who are interested in Mexico," he explained glibly. "I've heard a great deal of your cooking here, senora, of your chilis and tortillas and frijoles. I am sure that you can give a Mexican tinge to the dinner—and I'll engage that it won't be any cheap affair. I should want a private dining-room that would seat about a dozen—comfortably," he added.

"I think we can accommodate you," replied the senora, evidently struck by Garrick's positive assurance that it was "no cheap affair."

"Might I see the room?" he ventured.

"My largest private room is occupied by a party tonight," she replied. "Aren't there any others?"

"Yes, only I am afraid they are too small."

"Still, I might get some idea of how the large one is fitted up, might I not?" persisted Garrick.

"I will show you one that is not as handsomely decorated as the big one," she agreed at length.

Senora Mendez led the way upstairs, disclosing, in fact, several rooms. As they passed the door of one, it was opened by a servant bearing a tray of little cups of pungent, steaming liquid. Just for a moment Garrick caught a glimpse of the party inside. There were several ladies and gentlemen, all smoking the inevitable little cigarettes. One face, however, caught and held his attention. It was Senora Castillo. Beside her sat her dark-haired visitor at the Vanderveer. There was only time for a glance, but Garrick recognized none of the others—certainly there was no one who looked like the latest visitor at the hotel, he of the furtive glance.

Senora Mendez closed the door herself, with a little exclamation of vexation, then ushered Garrick into a smaller room down the hall.

On a piano in the larger room some one was playing a peculiar rhythmic composition, with a curious thread of monotonous melody running through it like the timeful beat of a drum.

Senora Mendez's dark eyes were more languishing than ever. Indeed the pupils looked as if they were expanded by a dose of belladonna. As Garrick caught her glance, he realized that she was under the influence of mescal, at least partly.

He was not slow to take advantage of the knowledge. As she displayed the room, not without a touch of pride, he complimented her, adding quickly: "But, senora, it is not only the room that is atractive."

The rhythmic beat of the music down the hall continued. Garrick seemed to catch the spirit of it.

"I should like to try mescal—once," he ventured. "What is it?"

"A shrub—a religion," she answered dreamily.

"I should like to try it," repeated Garrick.

The senora pushed an electric bell and a servant appeared. A few moments later she returned with a tray of the little mescal buttons, curious round, disc-like things about an inch in diameter and perhaps a quarter of an inch thick.

Senora Mendez took a button, pared off the fuzzy tuft of hairs on the top, rolled it into a pellet, placed it in her mouth and began to chew it slowly, with closed eyes.

Garrick did the same carefully. The pungent taste told him that it was the same as the odor he had observed from the steaming cups that the servant had been carrying during his momentary glimpse into the larger room.

He felt a sense of new physical energy and intellectual power, which soon, however, wore off. Then followed a display of images and colors, a confused riot like a kaleidoscope. The lights in the room became as steady and bright as the sun, only surrounded by the prismatic colors, blazing with glory as if they shone on sands of diamond dust. The ornaments—strange Mexican gods and objects of art—seemed to take on a glory that was almost supernatural until it was no longer any wonder to Garrick that in the untutored minds of the half savages the mescal button should have produced something like a religion.

The servant returned, clothed this time in a sort of halo of light and color, every fold of her dress radiating the most delicate tones. She whispered a word to the senora, who quickly rose and excused herself. As she left, she seemed rather to float over the carpet than to walk.

Garrick had been waiting for just such an opportunity. Here he was, alone in the room. He had been careful not to take too much of the drug, and for a moment, as he heard the footsteps retreating, he threw open the window and breathed in the pure, fresh outside air in gulps to clear his head. Outside his door all was now quiet, except the sounds down the hall. What were they doing? He tiptoed silently along, fearful lest a loose board might betray him. As he went he looked about into each of the little rooms. All seemed to be empty. Nowhere was there any one who answered the description of the mysterious stranger.

He paused for a moment at the door. Inside, the group were discussing in low tones the fortunes of the war that was raging in their homeland. From the tone of her voice, which he recognized now and then, it was evident that Senora Castillo was far from being reassured that all would be well with her husband. She was evidently suffering a distress that even the reassurances of the entire party could not allay.

Further down the hall, Garrick heard other voices, of a man and a woman. Although he was not quite able to recognize the muffled tones, he could at least catch a word now and then.

"Where is the money?" he heard one of them ask.

"In a safety-deposit vault down town."

"Then we must get the key—and a power of attorney from her to open it."

"I have tried."

"Then keep on—you must."

There was a movement in the room, as though the two were coming out again. Quickly Garrick retreated.

As he passed the door of the large dining-room he heard a voice say, "But even if I had the money here—in gold—what guarantee would I have that Jose would be released?"

He paused. It was evident what they were doing. They were getting the beautiful Senora Castillo more and more under the influence of the drug, weakening her reasoning powers, playing on her feelings—anything to get the key to the safety-deposit vault or even to get her to agree to open it herself and hand out to them the coveted gold.

Should he warn her? Only a moment's thought was needed to reject that thought. A warning might prove more dangerous now than an open alarm. Quickly he retraced his steps to the little room from which he had come, determined to act in a slower, but perhaps more effective way. Voices down the hall caused Garrick to turn suddenly. He had delayed too long. It was impossible now to get back into the room without being seen.

"You—you are a spy!" cried Senora Mendez, catching sight of him.

Retreat was cut off. Garrick could almost feel the fiery animosity which now snapped from the eyes of the senora who but a few moments ago had been talking with him so graciously. A gruff voice whispered something and suddenly the lights in the hall were extinguished. He caught the word "incommunicado." There was a rush, a sharp fight in the narrow passageway. Garrick could not see his assailants, nor had he any idea who they were save by the sounds which told him that he was hopelessly outnumbered. He felt himself unceremoniously shoved along. They had come to a flight of stairs. As if by the strength of two or three men he was slowly forced up, fighting every step, every inch. At last a door seemed to open and with an irresistible impulse he was catapulted through.

Garrick was cornered. Here he was locked in a room apparently without windows, a closet, against the walls of which he might beat without effect, where even his voice was muffled and swallowed up. He heard them pile something against the door which otherwise he might have battered down in time. He was unable to get out and give the alarm, unable to use the knowledge which he had so daringly risked his life to acquire. What might not happen to the beautiful senora at any moment now that they knew they had been watched, followed even to the very door of the little private dining-room?

He was bleeding profusely from a cut over his eye, but in the Cimmerian darkness that made no difference. Sight was useless here. His coat was torn, but he breathed a sigh of relief as he unslung the apparatus which he carried under his coat and found that it was practically unharmed. Quickly he worked, doing in seconds what otherwise might have taken minutes.

The tripod on which he would have set up his camera-like affair was broken, but he managed to patch it together.

"I'm locked in a sort of closet on the third floor of the tea room!" he fairly shouted. "They are planning to get the senora thoroughly under the influence of mescal and then——"

A groan sounded in the darkness beside him.

"My wife!"

Garrick drew back startled. Whose was the voice in the darkness? He blinked into the shadows, but could see nothing. Suddenly, a hand seemed to clutch his arm, sending shivers over him, with its cold, clammy unexpectedness. A man much worse wounded than he staggered at him from the floor to which he had sunk in a half-conscious stupor.

"Tell me—are they—is my wife——"

He stammered and would have fallen if Garrick had not supported him. In a moment the detective seemed intuitively to piece together the fragments of the scattered events of the evening, as Burke had pieced together the cipher.

"Castillo—you are Castillo!" he cried. "You came to the hotel tonight. In some way you found out that the senora was here. You followed."

"Yes. I managed to bribe a guard of the bandits after I was captured and to reach the border in a load of fruit. I swam the river. Everywhere I went I seemed to be surrounded by enemies. I made up my mind to travel here as fast as I could without being recognized. Then I went to the hotel to find my wife. They told me she had gone. I did not give my name, but from the description I recognized that it was with Santos. I knew that he often came here. I had heard the bandits say so. But no sooner had I entered and demanded to see the senora than they seized me and threw me into this room. And you—who are you?"

"A detective—working in the interest of your wife, though she does not know it," replied Garrick tersely, still fumbling with the apparatus he had set up.

Castillo, weakened though he was, beat upon the door in a frenzy. There was not even an echo from the barricade outside, not even a mocking laugh. It was maddening. He groaned and sank on the floor exhausted.

"Hurry!" shouted Garrick getting into his machine. "Get them before they can get away. Then release us. You will need a doctor, too, for the senora. They have plied her with the stuff to a dangerous point. Only hurry—hurry!"

"What are you doing?" moaned Castillo. "Are you crazy? Are you talking to yourself or," he added in a tense whisper, "to God?"

"Listen—Castillo," cried Garrick, almost beside himself with excitement. "You see this thing I have here. It is a new form of wireless telephone. The other end of it I have set up on the top of the Vanderveer, where there is the least interference."

Through the seemingly impenetrable walls of brick and stone he had been talking to Burke! Would it work? Beyond the fact that it had worked before he knew nothing. The minutes seemed to lengthen into hours as he waited. Suddenly there was the sound of the vicious knocking down of whatever had been used to barricade the door. Was it help—or was it their infuriated captors, ready now to wreak the cruel vengeance for which their race was noted?

The door crashed in and Garrick felt himself seized.

"Thank God, man, but you took an awful chance!" panted Burke, literally carrying him down stairs in his joy at finding him in no worse plight than he was.

Castillo staggered up and past them, stumbling, groping, falling down the steps. He sank half fainting at the feet of the senora, to whom the Vanderveer house physician was applying such restoratives as the unusual character of the case suggested. In the background a burly policeman was holding the discomfited Santos.

"It's no crime to give a private dinner party and have a little mescal," he was protesting. "Perhaps you do not know that I am Morelos."

"Morelos!" cut in Garrick contemptuously. "You may call yourself Morelos, the soldier of fortune, but the infallible finger print calls you Santos, swindler and counterfeiter."

Castillo had turned at the sound of voices. The look of enmity on his face as he caught sight of Santos was terrible.

"You may be thankful, Santos," ground out Garrick, "that I am going to put two prison walls between you and that man."